

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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MANEUVER: WHERE DOES IT FIT IN OPERATIONAL ART?

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT of

MANEUVER: WHERE DOES IT FIT IN OPERATIONAL ART?

Operational functions and elements of operational warfare are two of the components of operational art. Operational functions are the activities conducted by forces within a theater to provide the operational commander with the means to accomplish an objective. Elements of operational warfare are the direct results of a commander's decisions and are translated by his staff into a plan of action. This paper examines whether maneuver should be classified as an operational function or as an element of operational warfare, or both. Naval War College (NWC) Joint Military Operations (JMO) curriculum classifies maneuver as an element of operational warfare, but not as an operational function. Classification of the various operational functions and elements of operational warfare is important because it has a large impact on the planning and execution process. Additionally, the outcome of a conflict may turn on the proper identification and use of the pertinent components of operational art.

Joint and service doctrine treat maneuver as a principle of war, a style of warfare, an element of operational warfare and an operational function. Through analysis and example, maneuver is further described as both an element of operational warfare and an operational function in the context of operational art. The implications of exclusion of maneuver from classification as an operational function are discussed.

Service war colleges contribute to the development and practice of doctrine through the study and instruction of operational art. Therefore, it is recommended that NWC JMO Department revise its curriculum to classify maneuver as both an element of operational warfare and as an operational function.

I. Introduction: Operational Functions and Elements of Operational Warfare.

Operational art is the employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles.¹

In addition to the above definition, operational art has been described in terms of its components such as operational functions and elements of operational warfare. This paper will examine whether operational maneuver should be classified as an operational function or as an element of operational warfare, or both. Naval War College (NWC) Joint Military Operations (JMO) curriculum classifies maneuver as an element of operational warfare, but not as an operational function. Classification of the various operational functions and elements of operational warfare is important because it has a large impact on the planning and execution process. Additionally, the outcome of a conflict may turn on the proper identification and use of the pertinent components of operational art. The way the U.S. military fights wars and engages in other operations is based on joint and service doctrine. Doctrine, in turn, is based on the proper definition and classification of the components of operational warfare. Improper classification and definition of operational warfare components leads to the implementation of flawed joint and service doctrine. Flawed or incomplete doctrine could result in operational commanders not giving enough consideration to maneuver as they plan, prepare and execute operations.

Operational functions are defined as the activities conducted by forces within a theater that provide the operational commander with the means to accomplish an

¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: 1995), GL10.

objective. Operational functions should be observable regardless of the level of operations, from peacetime, to military operations other than war (MOOTW), to war.² Included in operational functions are the systems and human thought and planning necessary to conduct an operation. Operational functions are those things that are integral parts of any operation. NWC JMO curriculum lists the operational functions as command, control, communications, computers and intelligence (C4I), information warfare/command and control warfare (IW/C2W) architecture, operational fires, operational logistics and operational protection.

Elements of operational warfare are defined as the direct results of a commander's decisions and are translated by his staff into a plan of action. The commander and his staff can use the elements of operational warfare as a framework for planning operations. In order to successfully attain his objectives, the commander must ensure that the elements of operational warfare, as they apply to his forces and the enemy's forces, are understood and practically applied.³ Current NWC JMO curriculum classifies the elements of operational warfare as mobilization, deployment, combat employment and employment, operational support, center of gravity, concentration, maneuver, culminating point, regeneration of combat power, conflict/war termination, post-conflict activities, redeployment, demobilization and reconstitution.

II. The Classification of Maneuver.

The term maneuver carries the idea of an effect created out of nothing, so to speak--that is to say, out of a state of equilibrium--by using the mistakes

² Vego, M. N., "Operational Functions." *Operational Art: A Book of Readings* (NWC 4025) (Newport, R.I.: U. S. Naval War College 1995), 1.

³ Vego, M. N., "Elements of Operational Warfare." (Newport, R.I.: Unpublished Paper, U.S. Naval War College 1995), 3.

into which the enemy can be lured. It can be compared to the opening gambits in a game of chess. It is, in fact, a play of balanced forces whose aim is to bring about favorable conditions for success and then to use them to gain an advantage over the enemy.⁴

Clausewitz recognized maneuver as an idea. His concept of maneuver was as a part of the commander's thought process in the prosecution of the war. The commander uses his ability to maneuver his forces to produce an effect; that is, to set and keep the balance of forces in his favor. Maneuver is more than the movement of forces. It is the movement of forces in relation to the enemy or objective in theater. Maneuver is the effective management of force within space and time to create favorable operational conditions. The key to operational maneuver is in gaining an advantage throughout the conflict by the movement of forces against the enemy's center of gravity and critical vulnerabilities.

Joint doctrine first deals with maneuver as a principle of war, spanning the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war.⁵ Maneuver must be treated as a concept that is universal to all conflicts, including MOOTW. The interaction of conflict demands that forces be moved in such a way as to place one at an advantage over the other. Accordingly, joint doctrine has recognized that maneuver is one of the fundamental concepts a commander must address if he is to achieve his objective.

Maneuver is further defined within joint doctrine by its purpose. "The purpose of maneuver is to place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power. Maneuver is the movement of forces in relation to the

⁴ Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1976), 541.

⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-0, II-1.

enemy to secure or retain positional advantage...Effective maneuver keeps the enemy off balance and thus also protects the friendly force."⁶ Therefore, the commander must apply maneuver at the operational level. Maneuver of his forces at the operational level must be a fundamental facet of the commander's planning and execution.

The Navy and Marine Corps have adopted the concept of maneuver as a style of warfare. They have doctrinally divided warfare into two styles, attrition warfare and maneuver warfare. Although the Navy sees utility in both styles of warfare, it views maneuver warfare as the preferable and more effective style.⁷ The Marine Corps warfighting doctrine is based on the maneuver philosophy.⁸ Both services have adopted operational maneuver from the sea (OMFTS) as their operational philosophy. Navy and Marine Corps commanders use maneuver as an element of operational warfare in the planning process and as an operational function while conducting operations in a theater.

Attrition warfare is characterized by the achievement of victory through systematic application of massed fires to destroy enemy forces. In attrition warfare, there is little or no emphasis on the movement of forces in relation to the enemy, other than to initiate and continue the engagement. The focus of attrition warfare is on numerical superiority and the pitting of strength against strength.

Maneuver warfare uses speed and surprise to knock the enemy off balance. It exploits enemy weaknesses and maintains the tempo of the conflict at a level beyond with which the enemy can cope. Maneuver is multidimensional in that it seeks to gain

⁶ Ibid., A-2.

⁷ Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (NDP 1), *Naval Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: 1994), 31-33.

⁸ Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM1, *Wartfighting* (Washington, D.C.: 1989), 30.

advantage in both space and time; the commander selects the time and place to confront the enemy. Maneuver warfare emphasizes the battle of the wills.

The Air Force endorses the concept of maneuver as a principle of war. It views the goal of maneuver to “place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.”⁹ The Air Force seeks to use the three dimensions it operates in to combine maneuver and mass simultaneously in order to generate overwhelming speed and firepower against surface forces.¹⁰

In Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, the Army has characterized maneuver as a principle of war, an element of combat power and a combat function.¹¹ Maneuver is a principle of war because the commander’s understanding of it is “fundamental to operating successfully across the full range of military operations.”¹² The commander’s use of this principle determines the type of warfare, attrition or maneuver, which is to be brought to a particular operation.

The Army further states that as an element of combat power, maneuver must be combined with the other elements, which are firepower, protection and leadership, to determine the outcome of any conflict. “Maneuver is rarely effective without firepower and protection...,” they “...are inseparable and complementary dynamics of combat.”¹³ This gets to the heart of the planning process. In order to ensure that the elements of

⁹ Department of the Air Force, Air Force Manual 1-1 (AFM 1-1), *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force* (Washington, D.C.: 1992), 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹¹ Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5 (FM 100-5), *Operations* (Washington, D.C.: 1993), 2-5, 2-10, 2-12.

¹² Ibid., 2-4

¹³ Ibid., 2-10.

combat power are properly integrated, the commander must address each of the elements during the planning process.

In Army terminology, commanders use combat functions, such as maneuver, to build and sustain combat power. Here the focus is on synchronization and coordination of the forces and effects of the various combat functions, such as intelligence, fire support, air defense, mobility and survivability, logistics and battle command. The combat functions are viewed as parts of the system the commander places in the theater to conduct operations. Combat functions are composed of hardware, software, equipment, personnel and the commander's concept of operations. Similar to operational functions, the Army's combat functions provide the commander with the means to accomplish an objective.

III. Maneuver: An Element of Operational Warfare.

As discussed above, the elements of operational warfare provide the fundamental framework for planning and conducting operations. The commander must make decisions concerning each of the operational warfare elements and his staff must translate the decisions into a workable plan.

Maneuver is undeniably an element of operational warfare that the commander and staff must address in any situation. The commander must decide how he wants his forces to approach and engage the enemy. The staff must pull together all of the details necessary to get the right forces to the right place at the right time. Even in MOOTW, forces must be positioned in the best way to achieve the objective.

In many ways, the elements of operational warfare, as discussed here, are analogous to the Army's combat functions. These elements must be planned, integrated and coordinated to bring the whole effects of combat power to bear upon attainment of the objective. Failure by a commander to consider each of the elements of operational warfare could result in failure to achieve the objective, greater cost in reaching the objective or higher risk in the conduct of the operation.

IV. Maneuver: An Operational Function.

The activities that a commander and his forces perform in a theater in order to accomplish an objective are the operational functions. Any system or concept that is essential for a commander to advance toward his objective should be considered as an operational function. Without the operational functions, the commander cannot hope to accomplish his objectives.

Current NWC JMO curriculum includes fires as an operational function, yet it omits maneuver as an operational function. Joint and service doctrine view maneuver and fires as distinct, yet inseparable, functions. Several rationale have been given for the exclusion of maneuver as an operational function.¹⁴

The first rationale is that operational functions are only found in a mature theater. It is argued that operational functions must inherently exist within the theater. For example, operational fires are an operational function because they are supported by command and control, which are found in the mature theater. This viewpoint focuses on

¹⁴ Interview with Prof. J.M. Vego, Joint Military Operations Department, U.S. Naval War College, Newport R.I.: 17 January 1996.

operational functions as systems and excludes the human element in the quest for the objective. In order to achieve an objective, the commander and his forces will be required to conduct the activities that compose operational functions regardless of the state of preparation found in a particular theater. Since the conclusion of the cold war, U.S. forces have operated in immature theaters more frequently than in mature theaters, and indications are that the trend will continue in the future.

The second rationale is that operational functions should provide protection to the friendly center of gravity (COG), which maneuver does not provide. The flaw in this argument is that it fails to see the defensive advantages of successful maneuver. The force that effectively uses maneuver, as a style of warfare, will render the enemy impotent, and thereby, unable to gain an offensive position. "Maneuver keeps the enemy off balance, protecting the force."¹⁵

The third rationale for excluding maneuver from the list of operational functions is that it does not apply in MOOTW situations. It is argued that there is no maneuver for MOOTW because maneuver is used to isolate the enemy or to attack the enemy's COG, which is unnecessary in MOOTW situations. This argument relies on too narrow of a definition of maneuver. Maneuver, when practiced as a style of warfare, is used to produce an effect on the opposition. The purpose of maneuver is to advance toward the objective, whether that objective is creating a stable and orderly environment in which to feed the population or to establish a position between factions in order to enforce a peace agreement. As they came ashore in Somalia, the Marines practiced operational maneuver

¹⁵ Department of the Army, FM 100-5, 2-10.

as an operational function in a MOOTW situation. Finally, the NWC JMO curriculum definition of operational functions includes all levels of operations from peacetime through war. Maneuver is used at every level of operations, and should be included as an operational function; it is an essential activity for operational success.

It has already been seen that the services rely heavily on maneuver as a principle of war, a style of war, an element of operational warfare and as an operational function. NWC JMO curriculum suggests that the operational "...functions are key factors for success in the use of force to accomplish assigned objectives across the entire range of military objectives."¹⁶ Thus, one would expect the exclusion of maneuver as an operational function to have important implications for the operational commander.

With maneuver excluded as an operational function, the operational commander and his staff may fail to consider it as they plan and conduct the activities within the theater necessary to accomplish an objective. If the commander and staff do not consider maneuver an operational function, it may be omitted from the operational level of activities and left to the tactical level, thus depriving the operation of the integration of maneuver with fires, protection and the other operational functions. Thus, it is imperative that service war colleges and other institutions that support the development and implementation of doctrine include maneuver as an element of operational warfare and an operational function.

¹⁶ U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department, *Course Syllabus* (Newport, R.I.: 1995), 22.

V. Operational Maneuver In Real World Situations.

Real world situations show the necessity to include maneuver as an element of operational warfare and an operational function. Somalia has been cited earlier as an example of operational maneuver in a MOOTW situation. Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm (DS/S) provide an example of operational maneuver in a major regional contingency. In DS/S General Schwarzkopf and his staff planned the operational maneuver of naval, ground and air forces to engage Iraqi forces. Schwarzkopf's concept of using Marine forces as a deception force and then repositioning the Army VII Corps in order to conduct the sweeping movement from Saudi Arabia into Iraq and Kuwait was an example of maneuver as an element of operational warfare. He combined maneuver with fires, protection, C4I and the other operational functions to advance the coalition forces toward the objective.

The Korean conflict provides yet another example of operational maneuver as an element of operational warfare and as an operational function. At Inchon, MacArthur used maneuver in his concept of attempting an amphibious landing mid-way up the Korean peninsula to strike behind the lines of overextended North Korean forces. Subsequently, maneuver was used as an operational function, in a fairly immature theater, to advance toward the objective of driving out the communist forces.

VI. Conclusion.

Maneuver is a vital element of operational warfare as well as an essential operational function within any theater. This view is fully compatible with joint and service doctrine. It enables commanders to make optimum employment of forces to

accomplish objectives. Commanders seeking to make full use of the tools of operational art should incorporate maneuver throughout the planning, preparation and execution process. Properly planned and executed, maneuver will enable the commander to upset the state of equilibrium spoken of by Clausewitz earlier.

Service war colleges contribute to the development and practice of doctrine through the study and instruction of operational art. In view of the benefits gained by including, as well as the implications of excluding, maneuver as an operational function, it is recommended that NWC JMO Department revise its curriculum to classify maneuver as both an element of operational warfare and as an operational function. As an element of operational warfare, maneuver should be in the commander's mind to plan, integrate and coordinate with the other elements in an effort to bring the desired amount of power to bear on an operation. As an operational function, maneuver should be one of the functions performed by forces in a theater to accomplish an objective. Clearly, a commander who applies maneuver to both the operational functions and elements of operational warfare is practicing operational art in the fullest sense.

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